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SUBJECT: GREEK STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT NATO, WWII

SUMMARY

¶1. From July 1 - 4, 2007, Mission Public Diplomacy staff escorted ten Greek international relations and political science graduate and post-graduate students to Brussels for briefings at NATO Headquarters and a tour of important World War II monuments. The students appreciated the candor of their NATO interlocutors and felt they learned much about the positive role the U.S. played in Europe in World War II. They suggested another day at NATO Headquarters, including more substantive briefings. They asked for exposure to non-Western NATO missions, and they felt the trip as planned featured too much time in the bus. The students have set up an e-mail group to exchange ideas and attended two post-tour debriefings. End Summary.

MORE SUBSTANTIVE BRIEFINGS

¶2. The students felt there was a lot of overlap between their introductory briefing (Jonathan Parrish) and the briefing on NATO structure (Tom Underwood). They requested, instead, briefings on NATO operations, budget, and public diplomacy strategy. A few of the students expressed interest in a role-playing exercise to simulate NATO decision-making and resource allotment. Most of the students asked for a second full day of briefings, noting the chance to communicate with officials at NATO was the most unique part of the tour.

GREAT MONUMENTS; LESS BUS TIME

¶3. One student commented that he was "amazed by how much the Americans had done for Europe in World War II," and several said that visits to Bastogne and the Henri Chappelle Cemetery made those events real for them. A visit to the Remember Museum, where memorabilia from U.S. war veterans is on display, gave the trip a powerful emotional angle. The distances between these sites, however, were great, and the students felt they were rushed and spent too much time on the bus. A happy hour with professor and NATO expert Dr. Edwina Campbell had to be cancelled when the bus was delayed returning to Brussels. One suggestion included sleeping near Bastogne the first night, taking tours the next day, and then ending in Brussels.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS

¶4. As usual, NATO scheduled a briefing at the Greek Mission for the group without escorts. The students reported that the Greek

Ambassador to NATO shared his thoughts with the students on whether Greece could truly be called the leader in the Balkans, and the students raved about the briefing. Both the American PD officer and the Greek PD Specialist from the U.S. Consulate in Thessaloniki who were escorting the group were barred from the briefing.

POST FOLLOW-UP AND RESULTS

15. The students made it clear that much of what they learned during the trip was not covered in their previous studies, and they have been excited about sharing their experience. They were asked for their feedback at a post-trip debriefing with the Public Affairs Officer and at a casual dinner with a Greek desk officer and a post PD officer. The students have also established an informal e-mail group to exchange ideas. Several of the students have discussed possible programs with other students as the new school year begins.

16. This student program is a first for Mission Greece and supports our priority goal of engaging and informing youth audiences. The high levels of anti-Americanism and misinformation about NATO, and history in general, in Greece underscores the continuing need for Greek student NATO tours. The extremely positive reaction of the student participants in this tour reaffirms the value of this program.